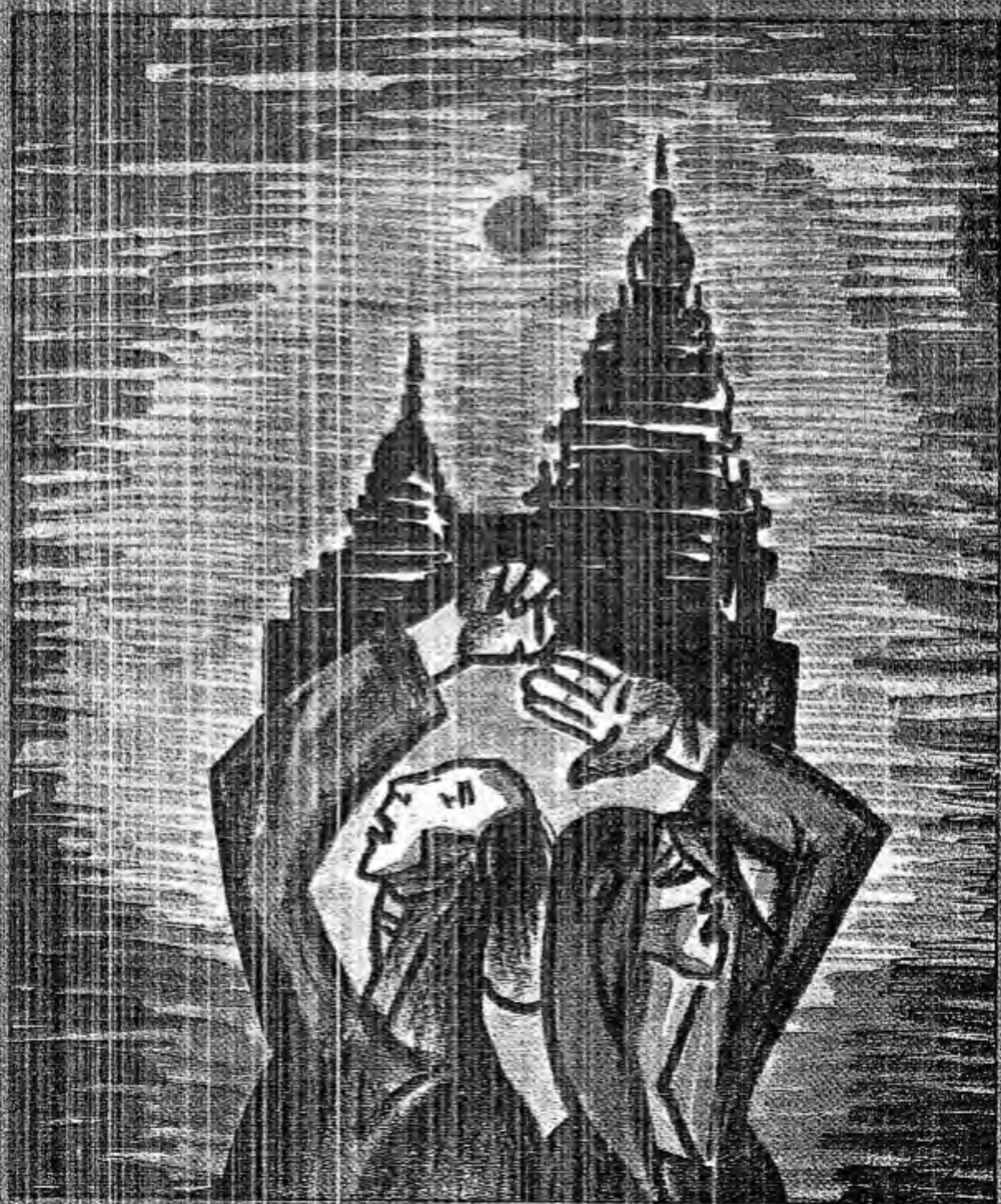


A
Temple in Ayodhya
and other poems



Amit Jayaram

While many think the nation slipped back several decades on December 6th, 1992, others find the event a cause for celebration.

However, one predominant view is that it has created a deep schism in our nation, which threatens our integrity and questions our Indianness.

A Temple in Ayodhya and other poems is a collection that holds a mirror to the event, to help us all focus on it and define, or redefine, our responses to the incident—and all it implies.

The book has three sections. The first, **A Temple in Ayodhya**, reflects on men, monuments and mysticism. The second, **Man**, turns the inward eye on the strange, elusive amalgam known as man. The third, **Who killed Safdar Hashmi?**, looks at life in the web of inter-relations people call society.

Rupa New Poetry

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My World

A Reporter's Diary

Anna Sujatha Mathai

The Attic of Night

Makarand Paranjape

The Serene Flame

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Rachna Joshi

Configurations

Bibhu Padhi

A Wound Elsewhere

Prabhanjan K Mishra

Vigil

Shanta Acharya

Not This Not That

Ashok Mahajan

Uniformly Crazy

Sanjiv Bhatla

Haiku, My Friend

A Temple in Ayodhya

Amit Jayaram

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To the big blue yonder,
whence it all came.

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To Tarun and Raabiya, my two little says of sunshine; and to Keerti, without whom this book, and much else, would have been impossible.

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OM PURNAMIDAH PURNAMIDAM
PURNATH PURNAMUDACHYATHE
PURNASYA PURNAMEDAYA
PURNAMEVAVASHISHYATHE

Om
That is the whole,
This is the whole,
From wholeness emerges wholeness,
Wholeness comes from wholeness,
Wholeness still remains.

A Temple in Ayodhya

Reflections on men, monuments
and mysticism

Temple

A place of worship

Ayodhya

Town in Uttar Pradesh; birthplace of Lord
Rama

Let's Build a Temple

Let's build a temple to Lord Rama
Let's build the temple in our hearts
A goodly temple, soft and gentle
In peace, without these fits and starts

Let's build it, in our Hindu vein
Without a trace of hate or blame
Let's build it with red bricks of love
And light in it compassion's flame

Let's consecrate this temple to
The all encompassing one above
Who made us all, and gave us all
Limitless, effulgent love

Let's make this temple blazon forth
Throughout the day, throughout the night
That God's great will must never be
Defiled by muscles or by might

Let's let all people come into
This temple which reveals the sky
God is no man's property
No man knows the reason why

If our faith is really great
Let's open its doors to all the world
Let universal breezes raise
A universal flag unfurled

Let this temple tell the world
We are not petty, not infirm
We are not threatened or afraid
No force on earth can make us squirm

We do not need to etch our faith
With iron on the stones of time
It's all around, within, without
It needs no mortar, bricks or lime

We do not need to stress, define
Our faith against another's creed
One of the world's most ancient faiths
Has no need to resort to greed

Let's build a temple to Lord Rama
Let's build the temple in our hearts
A goodly temple, soft and gentle
Where anger dies, hatred departs

The Day

It was the day
that made all the difference

After the day
it was always night

No matter
how many times the sun rose
or set
it was always night.

The nightmare comes and goes
but night stays on
And that large, enveloping darkness
soon absorbs
even those little rays of light
that were left behind

This is my darkness
This is your darkness
This is everybody's darkness
Yes — even the darkness of those
who made it happen
so that their lives
would have more light

How can deep darkness
bring more light?

How can the howling cry
of anguish give birth to joy?

It was the day
that made all the difference

Before the day
it was sometimes bright
sometimes night

The cloak
of inky black darkness
had not yet
swirled around our world

Before the day
we were not strangers in our homes
And needed
no towering forms in black
to tell us who we were
what we wanted
why we lived

What is this love so fragile
that any stranger can dash it dead?

Why are we tinderboxes
for every lawless hand
to ignite?

The Very Stone Can Feel

My baby dead
what did it do?

What stone walls are these
That snatch away
the breath from my infant's lips?

We're blind and deaf
We cannot hear
Our greed for power
Has blocked our ears
Even as we break the stone
The stone it shivers
Sheds a tear

It cries for my poor baby's life
It cries for all the men who groan
It cries for women turned to stone
By our jagged million-headed knife

What are these tears? They hurt us not
What are these howls? We sleep in peace
While they cower, whine and freeze
Submerged by our sinister plot

We are the authors of this dying
Yes, all of us who shout and scream
Fracture, pummel fragile dreams
Turn laughter to sad moans and sighing

The very stone can feel, can think
But men are rotten, women stink
How can we eat and laugh and drink
While widows howl and bodies shrink?

Mask-like Faces

Let's hide behind each other
Let's lie flat on the ground
And pretend we aren't there. . .

They won't notice
They'll go away
And we can start living again

Let's close our eyes to their screams
Turn mask-like faces to stone
Present our back to trouble
What can we do alone?

Let's hide behind each other
Let's lie flat on the ground
And pretend we aren't there. . .

Dear God

Dear God, we will not ever rest
Till we repay, give you your due
E'en if we must finally test
Ourselves by blindly killing you

Dear God, your house is sacred, great
Our swords are out to make it true
We'll thrash the heathen scoundrels now
Teach them a precious thing or two

Dear God, we're always at your service
We'll build a building of your dreams
Cement it with the blood of children
Tears of women, father's screams

Dear God, we hope you like our service
We want you to accept it please
Why do you think we burnt those houses
Made infants bake and children freeze?

Dear God, you are most special to us
There's only one, just one of you
The others are just worthless heathens
Who cares? Let's whip and flog a few

Dear God, we are not cringing cowards
Who whimper, whine and wag our tail
Anyone who slights your form
We'll kill — e'en if he's weak and frail

Dear God, we are misunderstood
All we want is peace and love
But no one wants to let it be
These other guys, they push and shove

Dear God, how can they understand
Their God is false, while you are true
We are but serfs at your command
Taming them to pray to you

Dear God, this world is harsh and wicked
People say we fight for gain
Place no flowers at your great altar
But death and sickness, screams and pain

Dear God, we'll build a temple massive
Bigger than the biggest hill
To sing your praise, make all your subjects
Ever bending to your will

Dear God who made us, gave us form
You we solemnly do praise
Whether in the sun that rises
Or whether in the whip that flays

Dear God, remember you're the reason
You're the rhyme, the goal, the light
And all who come in your great way
Must very firmly be set right

Dear God, give people wisdom, insight
Tell them that we mean no harm
Fill their hearts with fear for you
And we will all withdraw, be calm

Dear God, it's hard, but we abandon
All daily chores, set out to save
The faithless heathens from their folly
Send the blackguards to their graves

Dear God, we're sad to have to say this
If even you stood in the way
We'd have to kill you, don't you see
So that you are redeemed and saved

Enlightenment

So how now, there, my little lamb
My darling ewe, my snowy ram
You have no faith, no creed, no race
You just gambol, run and chase
Dear lamb, your simple mind would split
Your ears would stand, you'd throw a fit
If you were told that these great men
Who wield a stick and use a pen
Divide themselves and make a fuss
It's them for them and us for us
Imagine lambs who went to church
Temples, mosques, to pray and search
For God, who is below, above
Within, without, in truth, in love
And then kill, loot and plunder, raid
The other lambs that God has made
There, there, I understand your baa
There, you're free — gambol afar
Some day, perhaps our men — all shams
Become enlightened, like all lambs

A Small Plot of Land

Poor Lord Rama
The Monarch of the Universe once
Today, it all depends
On one small plot of land
In an unfortunate town
Called Ayodhya

I don't know much, I'm little, small
But I can't understand
So many things the grown-ups do
Across our great big land

I'm so confused, my teachers say
That honesty will rise
Yet, all I hear and feel and see
It tells me: No! Just lies!

Our holy books, they tell us to
Love all the world as one
But my elders and my betters
Raise a sword, a gun

My parents tell me to respect
All faiths, as they do mine
But every day, more grown-ups die
For some religious shrine

What lesson will we children learn
With grown-ups acting thus?
Can I be impudent, and say
That they should learn from us?

Because no longer do we watch
And see the fight from far
Kids like me are being killed
In grown-ups' holy wars

I don't know much, I'm little, small
But I can't understand
So many things the grown-ups do
Across our great big land

Death Comes to Dance

Break my bones
Kill my wife
Slaughter my child
Burn my house. . .

But what will you do
At night
When death comes
To dance with you?

Across the Sands

If I were dead, and you were here
With lifeless pen in lifeless hand
Which words would come to you, my dear
When time, and I, have crossed the sands?

Between my tears, I sometimes smile
To think the hand that struck you dead
Considered, for that little while
Satisfied, revenged, well fed

But foolish being, you lost it all
By killing my true, my only love
Because in fear and guilt you'll crawl
While he just watches from above

I sit and watch and wonder at
The smoke that leaves the chimney tops
It's all dull, boring, drab and flat
An endless army of full stops

But you're in me, I see you now
Reclining in that cane armchair
With twinkling eyes that tell me how
And when and what and who and where

Some summers past, the pain will slow
And you will come alive in me
For though blind hatred howl below
Love will triumph, we'll be free

If I were dead and you were here
With lifeless pen in lifeless hand
Which words would come to you, my dear
When time, and I, have crossed the sands?

Cloaked in Silence

Yes, the renaissance has begun
Centuries of sloth have been shaken off
And the Hindu steps forward
From the shadows

The upstart peddlers of Hinduism
Who speak in frenzied voice
Have woken us from our slumber

This is not Hinduism
It is a creature of circumstance
Claiming to be Hindu

Because every Hindu who is a Hindu
Is cloaked in silence

Yes, we are Hindus
Born into a race, a creed
That must
At the very peril of its existence
Oppose this masquerading fanaticism
That wears the cloak
Of the Hindu faith

Only Death

You say you cannot speak up
You say that they will tear
Your life into a thousand pieces
You'll lose the ones who care

You say that life is precious
To you and them and me
But where's the life? Can't find it
It's only death I see

Imagined Images

The frenzied man
Sees his form in the mirror
Imagines another
And smashes the mirror

He destroys a form he created

The frenzied man
Sees a form before him
Imagines another
And smashes the image

He destroys a form God created

Who's this man
if not you and me?

Yourself

Rip out the trees
Tear up the earth
Lay bare the skeleton
Of what created you
Nourished you
And nourishes you still

The Beyond does not stop you
The Beyond cannot stop you
From heaping this mountain of filth
Upon yourself

Until you see it is filth. . .

This and That

We'll sit and have a cup of tea
And chat awhile of this and that
We'll sit and have a cup of tea
While, all around, the world falls flat

We'll sip and talk of bad days come
And politics that's full of scum
But when it's time to raise our hand
To assert, be counted, take a stand. . . .

We'll sit and have a cup of tea
And chat awhile of this and that
We'll sit and have a cup of tea
While, all around, the world falls flat

Flesh of My Flesh

Dad, who am I?
From where did I come?
Why am I here?
And where will I go?

You are my daughter
Born to me
Flesh of my flesh
Blood of my blood

I will make you like me
I will make you me
I will live through you
So thoroughly
That you will cease to exist

Is our temple
the testament of our faith
to be built
on blood and tears and bones?

Is our house of prayer
to be surrounded
by the language of the sword?

Is our sanctum sanctorum
our final abode of peace
to be created on the ruins
of another?

Are we lions
who hold our heads aloft?
Or jackals
who loot and plunder?

Is this the final image
of a fragile faith
that has arisen over millenia?

Have we no covenant?
Are we going to let it all
go down the drain?

And whistle on our way to work?

The Earth, the Sky

We measured heartbeats, you and I
Our feet stepped out in time
When you were earth, I was the sky
Our thoughts they always rhymed

No ties of blood, no marriage bond
Could come close to our love
It was as if a magic wand
Had joined us from above

Now, friendship is a funny thing
It's hard to talk, explain
A feeling that's a flowering
Unlinked to praise or gain

But who could know that better than
Poor you, my cold dead friend?
You had no faith, no creed, no clan
You saw all beings as men

It's hard to see how people who
Say I am theirs, they mine
Can aim their sticks and knives at you
And taint me with their crime

Why are they rubber stamped?
Why make a stigma of one's birth?
It all should be revamped

My friend, I'll say it, say it loud
You did not die in vain
Till my last breath, I'll stand up, proud
'Gainst hurt and hate and pain

Friendship, love does not depend
On where a person kneels. . .
But when he does not hurt, offend
But sees and cares and feels

The body seems such solid stuff
Compassion nought but dew
But look deep in, and soon enough
It will arise in you

I . . . I . . . I

When will my small eyes open?
When will I be blessed to see?
It's not you I hurt and slaughter
It's me, it's me, it's me

When will my ears hear something
A scream, a shout, a cry?
It's not you I hurt and slaughter
It's I, it's I, it's I

The Crowbar and the Pickaxe

Unless you and I
And others of our faith
Speak up, stand up and blazon forth —
That this is not Hinduism,
This will be Hinduism
To the world

Do the Gita and the Upanishads
And the Vedas tell us
To seek God in stone?

To lay waste, to violently assert
A piece of land, a temple?

Do the crowbar and the pickaxe
sum up the quintessence of Hinduism?

Must we all stand by
And watch this parody?

Will no one speak up?
Have we lost our tongues?

The Loser

For every fight
For every momentous battle
Of principles
Fought with stick and gun
There's only one loser —
The common man

When will we tire of living in
A world so sad, so upside down?
Where yes means no and no means yes
And every smile just cloaks a frown

When will we learn that temples are
Much more than sticks and mud and stone?
Just symbols of God's ageless truth:
We are together, not alone

Not us or them, but them and us
Not I, me, mine, but we and ours
And then the thousand stratagems
Just vanish in the twinkling stars

When will we tire of living in
A world so sad, so upside down?
Where yes means no and no means yes
And every smile just cloaks a frown

The Song of Time

A wrinkle is a wondrous thing
Because it has been earned
An aged life can dance and sing
The song of time it learned

A failing eye can see so clear
Distinguish every form
While younger, sharper eyes pass on
Caught up in their own storm

A shaking hand can grasp the point
Can say: No, that's a lie!
While oak-like arms wield arms to kill
Although they know not why

A feeble ear can hear the sound
Of misery and pain
While sharp, young ears are blocked to tears
Yet hear the sound of gain

An aged nose can smell a rat
And see that it's a ruse
While little pups go sniff, sniff, sniff
And scramble and abuse

A feeble brain takes two and two
And adds it up to four
While brilliant minds are lost in greed
And do not know the score

I've lived eight decades, if a day
I've seen it all go by
All the misery and pain
There's just one reason why

We always want it all our way
The other's just a thing
Who does the dirty work while we
Do all the gathering

So break the house they made for God
And they'll break yours as well
Where is God in this charade?
It's nothing but plain hell

I am so old, my days are few
My breath is running out
But all we do, we do to us
About that there's no doubt

When a child says
I don't like him
The child says it

When a child says
I don't like her
The child says it

When a child says
I don't like them
We say it through the child

And there can be
Nothing uglier. . .

You Are My World

Come sit by me, my little one
Dry your tears and hear
A wondrous tale to you I'll tell
Come closer now, my dear

Once upon a wonderful time
This world was quite a place
People looked at people, not
Religion, colour, race

In those fine times, your Daddy would
Be sitting here with us
My dearest friend would be here soon
To sit with you, and fuss

Their bodies would be bright and gay
Not buried 'neath the ground
Because, you see, their faith would be
Unnoticed, safe and sound

The funny thing, my little one
Is that, though it's the cause
We must once more to God return
Bind ourselves by his laws

No matter how men may deceive
And twist his words and lie
He is the source of all there is
Between the earth and sky

That wonderful time that used to be
Has not forever gone
I'll speak to you, and fill your heart
In it love will be born

More mothers, more, and many more
Will teach their children why
Hatred bears no fruit, they'll see
Their love will fill the sky

In that mystic, magic world
Where love is such a force
Those who fight and kill and hurt
Will have no other course

But to see their ways are wrong:
That violence kills the soul
The tide of love will wash them clean
And make them pure and whole

And those faceless people who
Did kill your father dead
Will see their fault, will be redeemed
In shame will hang their heads

My darling one, your eyes are closed
Your breath is smooth and soft
But your heart is listening
Your spirit stands aloft

Though these weary, aged eyes
Mayn't live to see the day
Your tender generation will
Let all its children play

So sleep, sleep well, my little one
In my tired arms, soft, curled
I pin my faith on your soft heart
Because you are my world

Man

The inward eye turned on the
strange, elusive amalgam called man

Life Fled Past

Your smile limped
So you stood it up
With crutches

Embraced the crucifix
And hungered for the nails to make their mark
On the ragged framework of skull and crossbones
As life fled past, unknowing of your smile

What words?
The thoughts negate themselves
Barbaric inanities
Aimless criss-crossings
On the virgin white

Where are the athletes?
The businessmen?
The bankers?

Have they eaten well?
Slept well?
Dreamt well?

Throw away these empty acorns
Son of man
And face yourself

The sights and sounds
Of the sensuous play
Of a million
Kaleidoscoping levels of reality
Will make security
An empty acorn

Tossed by the wind
Singed by fire
Flowing with the tide. . .

Who says
The world isn't new?
It is the beggar
Who sees his bowl
Reflected in the world

Still the Sea

Sorrow, desperation and rage
Tried to set stars from their course
Willed the sun to rise due west
Bid the sea hold its waves. . .

Until the pain is bearable

Changing Mirrors

A world brought up on lies
A world unable
To stand
Its tortured reflection
In the glass

And changing mirrors
Every day

Santa Once Believed in Stockings

Maybe
Santa Claus once believed
In stockings

Maybe Che believed
That guerilla warfare
Is the answer

But today, it's all the same. . .

A civilisation
That has been nursed
On mothballs and corsets
Suddenly
Growing up to realise
That mothballs smell awful
And corsets are a pain

To say anything about you
Would cloak more than uncover
You must see my silence
For what it is — silence
What makes one silent
Is the presence of beauty

Why?

Why
The sky?
Why
Try?
Why
Sigh?
Why
Lie?
Why
Die?

Little Boys

"Thinking of the reason
That mind cannot perceive
Isn't that," quoth the Fool
"Like sand within a sieve?"

We live in a phantom world
And play with its toys
In attitude eager
At it with a noise
But we're little boys

Man Said That

The bard saw bars in his prison
So he sang of freedom
The poet saw his impotence
So he spoke loud and long of fruition, fulfilment
But the pavement saw its sterility
And remained sterile

The world's a prison
Man said that

Wrinkles

Your hair grows white and wrinkles line your face
Cold age sucks in your beauty from without
Tears and rage and sweat transform to grace
And life's long battle isn't worth the bout
If you suspect your inner beauty's charred
Because no man or woman felt its form
Because the sand was lost in its own storm
And beauty was deferred, declaimed, debarred
Turn once to one who saw the form you hid
The shades that threw bright light on all the frowns
That lingered in your smiles, took off the lid
From all the masks, including bright gold crowns
Which all at once took flight to realms unknown
While moths sang songs, and flesh conversed with
bone

The world makes magic in your soft brown eyes
The seas advance, recede in your bright smile
Your laughter waves goodbye to sighs and whys
Allows not mind this nature to confile
A moment of your madness says "amen"
To situations which the wise condemn
Freezing all in tones of us and them
And the lightening silence comes again
When two strings throb to one another's time
And harmony arises of its own accord

Evening smooths, redeems the daytime's crime
And frail flesh and blood is with the Lord
What mystery makes this world go round in time
What purity resides in primal slime?

Who knows what webs tomorrow has in store?
Who knows what tricks fate holds in its cold hand
Who knows what magic hides in this life's core?
Who knows when one should sit, or make a stand
The moment, Love, is ours, it's in our grasp
Let us not let it slip past us in vain
Embrace the loss, not barter with the gain
One sweat-stained finger another firmly clasps
This fragile song, this matchbook ode endures
No holding back and no one stops, debars
No disease will hurt, no easy cures
Will mock or maim the bright and shining stars
A moment in your company means flight
It means that nothing's wrong, and all is right

Lowland

Quite long ago, a land not far away
Had a very weird and wondrous law
Before a man or woman was condemned
The people grouped against them were constrained
To prove that they had harmed or hurt, curtailed
Man's freedom, or exploited helpless folk
And bar this council's speech which could indict
The culprit was full free to walk away
And mark, that he and she would only be
Condemned if they consented to the charge
The onus of the deed lay on the mob
And sentence was not passed until the man
The woman, hung a harried head, agreed
That they'd transgressed, o'erstepped and trampled on
Another's space, had robbed their ease and grace
And felt that if the same transpired with them
They'd also feel upset and ill at ease
And would desire the man to see and grasp
The fact that deeds like these threw out a web
Which entangled all within its fragile threads

The Final Truth?

Maybe the stench of queues
And the evening sound
Of a city in flames

Maybe the mildewed patchwork
Of hellos and byes
And the ragged in-betweens

Maybe the flame of lust
The dust of love
That lights a bonfire
In the Godman's eyes

Maybe the strings, the horns
The wind, the birds, the wires
The sounds of every day

Maybe the thrust, the push
The pull, the strain, the grab
The gain, the loss, the innocence

Maybe the books, the looks
The smiles that hide a horror
Too harsh to give a name

Maybe the deal, the barter game
To play with self, with life
And death and God scattered in between

Maybe the pounding veins, the frenzied game
The moth enflamed in voluptuous fire
Encompassing all beginnings, all ends

Maybe the thought that I and mine
Must solitary climb to the pinnacle
While the infant's tears mock the magic of life
Is the final truth

Who Killed Safdar Hashmi?

Life in the web of inter-relations
people call society

Who Killed Safdar Hashmi?

Who killed Safdar Hashmi?

Was it the gentlemen
Just doing their job
To make ends meet?

Or was it someone else,
Someone like you and me,
The guy who lives next door?

It was respectability
that killed poor Safdar Hashmi
A respectability
that now mourns his death

Who killed Safdar Hashmi?

Was it those of us who worry,
Lest our neighbour look down on us?

Or those who lead their lives
Within the rigid rails of
"What will others think?"

Or those who have their bone,
Want to be left alone
To chew it and chew it and chew it
In peace?

Or those who look upon all life
And love and care
As an investment,
For something in return?

Or those so fully wrapped in me and mine
That words like us and we
Seem much the same to them
As tales of fairies and of other worlds?

Who killed Safdar Hashmi?

We killed him, you and I
By looking the other way
By accepting a world where
Fair is foul and foul is fair

Our cowardice, our silence
Our tryst with gain and loss
Killed him dead before a blow was struck

In another world, with other creeds
The hands that rose to strike him
Would never rise for fear and shame

A thousand Safdars more will die
Until we learn to die
To all the trash we hold so dear
And clutch unto our breasts

Until cold death
Spawns love and care and kindness
In our hearts

Halla Bol

Halla Bol, Halla Bol
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls
Halla Bol, Halla Bol
For comfort we will play all roles

Now I like all the others
Oft looked the other way
When thinly-veiled oppression
Right before me lay

I had a happy home and
A real good job to match
So why speak up, be foolish
My happiness to snatch?

Embroider myself in issues
For one I never knew
Bid goodbye to comfort
A silly thing to do .

'Cause politics is dicey
They can break your head
Beat you blue with iron rods
And leave you very dead

Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls
Halla Bol, Halla Bol
For comfort we will play all roles

But then one day it wasn't
So easy any more
When no stranger's story
Came out to the fore

He was no friend, but he had
Been in my college class
For four years studying English
That academic farce

So when the morning paper
Said he was on the brink
Beaten by some lumpens
It made me stop and think

And when he died soon after
I heard an angry hiss
From somewhere deep within me:
This is rank cowardice

Halla Bol, Halla Bol
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls
Halla Bol, Halla Bol
For comfort we will play all roles

It is because of moderates
Good folks like you and me
Who never stand or speak up
That such a thing can be

Done to men and women
Across our great big land
Because we never raise our
Voice, or make a stand

When poets sell their words to
Meet terrestrial need
Limpid prose is fuel to
Cold commercial greed

Our few years on this planet
Forever will not last
Will we ever stand up?
Or keep on crawling past?

Halla Bol, Halla Bol
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls
Halla Bol, Halla Bol
For comfort we will play all roles

The fate of Safdar Hashmi
Is not his fate alone
Rude death stalks every corner
And in the wind is blown

Brute force is going crazy
No hand is on the rein
And every brother Abel
Runs from another Cain

It's time we took some time off
To speak for this frail earth
Or soon there'll be no time for
Our hollow, ragged mirth

Our land has many Safdars
Facing violent death
And if we still keep silent
We seal it with our breath

Halla Bol, Halla Bol
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls
Halla Bol, Halla Bol
For comfort we will play all roles

An Ode to Safdar

The player did not know what had transpired
He stared unbelieving at the gang of toughs
A moment past he was a man inspired
But now, before his eyes, he saw the rough
Outlines of things with sticks and rods and stones
Creating stark dark drama on the street
Their menace overflowed and stained the sky
In moments some crude sticks would break frail bones
Turn life and living to red butcher's meat
For sticks don't think, and stones can't hear men cry

Move back, move back, take cover now, go hide
He signalled to his fellows, go away
Run to that building quick, and get inside
I'll hold them off, be off, it's death to stay
They all went slow, uncertain of his fate
But go they did, although their nerves did grate
They stormed the door, the player followed fast
And locked it, they were all secure at last
Frightened, cornered, the players played for time
Victims of this strange, unnatural crime

But just one door was little help at all
The laughing, shouting screams soon filled the road
The laughing, shouting screams were in the hall
The lock it snapped, the door it bore the load
Blind hate was close, a step, a breath away
And in a bid to help protect his friends
He stood before the snarling, red-eyed mob
Before he stepped right out into the fray
Like the oak that will not ever bend
But rather break, before its strength is robbed

The sticks came down, came down with cruel intent
And made mad music on his arms and head
And he who to enliven people went
Was beat and beat till he was all but dead
The crowd stepped back, the Force stood still to see
But when the time was past, it was too late
The crowd awoke, the battered body still
While would-be helpers of their woes did prate
And cabs and rickshaws haggled 'bout their fee
'Cos death is fine, but it must fit the bill

Not all of us did know this player cast
In role severe, performance of his life
But if we look into our nameless past
We've looked away from that poor stranger's strife
In many forms, in many ways, we've left
The striving to the other man, next door
Because we have so much, so much to lose
Because we blame the thief, but not our theft
Because, if we just strip it to the core
It's you, and I, and him, in those poor shoes

So let us wake, and see the world anew
A world where sticks and stones are mute and still
A world where just a chosen, special few
With their mighty mansions on the hill
Fix not the fate of man and bird and beast
To play the dulcet tune for their big feast
A world where man turns not away from man
Where it's not always stars and also-ran
Where power and money cannot ever cloak
The sores, and turn life to a ragged joke

What about the Other Guy?

Then what about that other guy
Who ended up so very dead?
Who, passing by, just got to buy
A fatal dose of hurtling lead

Innocent, just there, bystanding
Only out to take the air
No politics he had his hand in
Shot dead before he turned a hair

So what about our people
Who in the sun do boil
With little or no recompense
For the hard, hard way they toil?

Why do they just keep giving
Their bodies to the soil?
What makes them so blind and mute
To society's hidden foils?

Nor is he the odd man out
A chap whose luck had just turned bad
Because, today, each man's fair play
It's turned into a trip, a fad

Flesh and blood are stopping bullets
Whole families are grazed away
Stick and stone break down frail bone
As we start another day

Well some of us are trapped by
Temple, mosque and church
What of the others who are
Just left out in the lurch?

We have a great old system
Of caste and kith and kin
Which holds most of the others
In the dreary web of sin

Tell me who's to blame at once
Enquire, detect, discern, descend
On guilty one, before he runs
These grave affairs we must now mend

But look, don't joke, what are you doing?
This glass in front of me you place
And say, "In your own juice you're stewing."
Why make me stare at my own face?

But some of us are urbane
Above such petty things
We're hungry for the loot and bargain
For small diamond rings

But yet there is a section
Of good and decent fellows
The ideal confection
But just a little yellow

"Of course it's you, you silly sod."
He hears his frozen image speak
"You feed the sick and heal the lame
But how come you never squeak?"

It's not just him that died that way
Many die unmourned, in vain
Far more than what the papers say
Perish in the howling rain

This yellow crowd is large, and
Unnoticed in its silence
A little pluck, a show of guts
Might stop this mindless violence

It isn't just a party
An anthem or a face
Or files in musty shelves that
Will halt this bloody race

There are some folks who're quite upset
Who think we're making quite a fuss
Of one Safdar, quite unheeding
Of million wounds all filled with pus

Hey look, those guys are human too
They lose their lives, and yet it seems
No group of people has the time
To listen to their thoughts, their dreams

No party can do nothing
No leader can be blamed
Unless we quit our grasping
Our narrowness, our claims

This whole atrocious structure
Is built of you and me
Innocent bystanders
With code and club and creed

If we all can't walk for Safdar
With full support from stars and bards
How will we ever blend, unite
To help protect those homes of cards?

It's far, far better to be young
Impetuous, too soon, too late
Than sort out all the pros and cons
And leave the others to their fate

So if we want some changes
The mirror does the trick
Its chaste and pure reflection
Our consciences should prick

We are all the bricks that
Make up this wall of greed
Unless we see that plain and clear
No one will be freed

The Living Dead

The majesty of wealth though unabating
Lights up the cracks in our own splintered nation
That feeds upon all sounds so raw and grating
With politics that grow on their negation
The hungry child and tears of rage are rocked
In cradles filled with lies and vain pretence
One rule for us and one for them, you say
The world's not all the same, with look intense
While just outside the door they're flogged and
mocked

But heed it not, forbear, it's nature's play

Send off your kids to school in shoes and ties
Help them learn the language of oppression
Bind their wings behind them 'fore they fly
Shear off all love and joy in six short sessions
Teach them to cheat, tell lies; be sly, compete
Put them in lines, teach them it's mine, at once
Louts that think things out should get the stick
Tell him this world has men just hired to beat
The poor up day to day to suit the slick
Who ride in fancy cars, you silly dunce

And when he goes to college, pick the best
Frequented by nice people of your type
So even if he turns out quite a pest
At least he won't be mixing with that tripe
He'll learn that if he ever goes to bed
With some sweet girl whose body turns him on
Then finds one more, the blame is all upon 'er
He sowed wild oats, 'twas she that got misled
What if he's done his thing and now is gone?
A man's got balls, a lady's got her honour

And now, refined, he'll find a steady job
A filing in magnetic fields of glitter
Each morn he'll pack his briefcase, join the mob
That looks for gold amidst the endless litter
His car goes through the endless zoo of rabble
In heat it stews, in endless queues, for buses
He sees the fray, his world goes grey, can't take it
He sees the trap, and something snaps. Don't babble,
Says a little voice within, who fusses
With those silly sods won't ever make it

All that is past, the future now is rosy
He has a wife, a home upon the hill
Vicissitudes have fled and all is cosy
From life's long table he has had his fill
By God's grace he has a lovely kiddo
A virgin page upon which life will write
His father hopes he will grow up well bred
Heal the sick, or from the law will cite
The final testament of his libido
Another soul among the living dead

Bread Mansion

There's a mansion down the road to here
They call it the Mansion of Bread
You're only allowed to pass the gate
When your human nature's dead

There are ladies in the corridor
Ostensibly not for hire
But pantingly eager to be laid
If you pull the proper wire

And the mosquitoes there — they're fussy
They only bite the residents
Everything is carefully planned out
They have no accidents

Rats rustle down their alleyways
Rattling dead men's bones
Deals are made in hushed whispers
On crimson telephones

And executives sit so very busy
Doodling on onion pads
Caressing all their clients
And counting all their wads

And Shakespeare's works, maroon bound
Lies 'neath the window pane
They tear it up, page by page
To wipe off ugly stains

If you're selling something they're eager
They'll listen with bated breath
And if you're plush and noble
They'll even ask about your health

They've traded away cities
Over a strong martini dry
Their eyes are kind of narrow
They can't hear people cry

But they're all right, society's friends
Who never break a law
'Cause they always wear velvet mittens
On their murderous paws

Now you might say they're heartless
And you may say they're cruel
Yet you and I must work for them
To earn our daily gruel

We must be hard-working
We must earn their trust
If we want their job and bread, then
It's vital that we must

And if you sit up one day
And organise the staff
You'll be on the street and starving
Hearing their merry laugh

The Lord made you to labour
And live by sweat of brow
So don't ask for any favours
And never ever ask how

Some people get the dainties
While you are stuck with mud
You've got what you deserve, my friend
It's written in your blood

So give the Lord all that you've got
And wait for Kingdom come
You don't even stand a chance out there
'Cause you're nothing but a dirty bum

Jesus dropped into the mansion
As He was passing by
And they thought He was a hippie
And punched Him in the eye

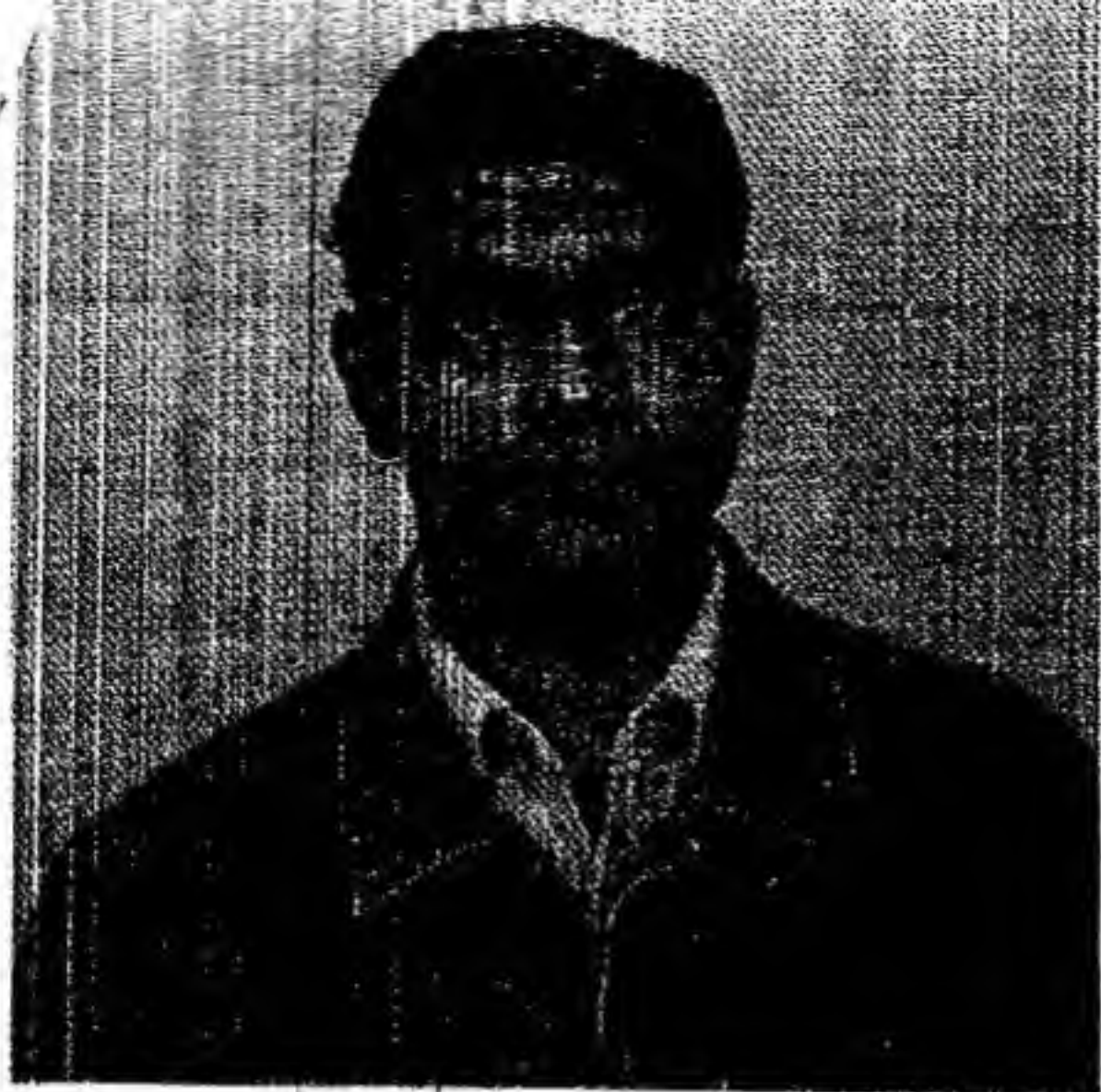
When He turned the other eye
They punched Him once again
And threw Him in the alley
Where a beggar came

He took Him to his hovel
Put wet mud upon His eyes
And Jesus felt at home right then
Beneath the crystal skies

This song has no great moral
And fights no worthy cause
Nor asserts eternal providence
Or upholds aged laws

Man, who thirsts and hungers
Lives not by bread alone
If his bread has now become
A hard, unyielding stone

And though out on Bread Mansion
They bind all that they find
They finally find they've traded
Their precious peace of mind



Amit Jayaram somehow passed his B.A. in English from St. Stephen's College, but found M.A. overpowering, and gratefully succumbed to a career as an advertising writer in 1974.

His interests include writing, film-making, reading, broadcasting, homeopathy, music, the environment, rural development, drama, photography...and not necessarily in that order!

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Amit Jayaram

Rupa



"This poet has a genuine feeling for social justice, and the inequitous exploitation of the poor by the rich. He also has an ease with rhyme, so that some of the poems have the flavour of songs or chants to be recited or shared by a group, on the streets, or in a theatre. Such poems should not only be sung on the streets, but included in school-children's texts."

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